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No. 96

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

RETREAT IN THE FAR EAST
Imperial Sunset in China and Malaya

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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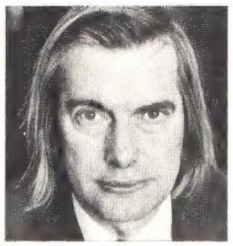

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: (*t*=top; *b*=bottom; *l*=left; *r*=right). Cover and page 2679: Radio Times Hulton Picture Library. Inside back cover: The Parker Gallery, London. Associated Press Ltd. 2682*al*, 2687*t*; Camera Press Ltd. 2684*l*, 2688; Church Missionary Society 2663; Keystone Press Agency Ltd. 2672*bl*, *br*, 2673*b*, 2684/5*t*; National Army Museum, London 2664/5*t*, 2665*bl*; Paul Popper Ltd. 2661, 2668, 2671*tr*, 2676/7, 2685*tr*; Radio Times Hulton Picture Library 2664*b*, 2665*tr*, *br*, 2666/7, 2670/1*b*, 2672/3*t*, 2674/5, 2680/1, 2684/5*b*; *Straits Times* 2669; United Press International 2682/3, 2685*br*, 2686, 2687*b*. PHOTOGRAPHER: Eileen Tweedy inside back cover.

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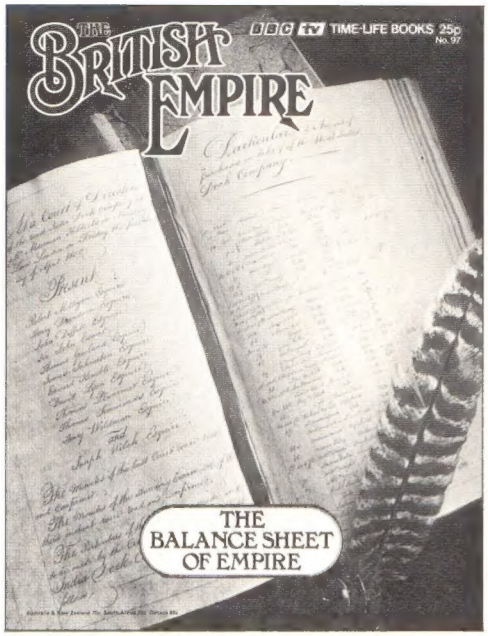
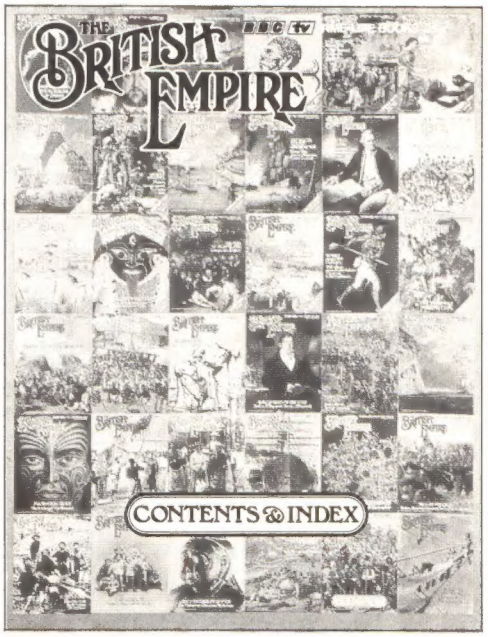
Published by Time-Life International (Nederland) B.V. in co-operation with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Distributed in the U.K. by Time-Life International Ltd. and BBC Publications.

Printed in England by Jarrold and Sons Ltd. Norwich.





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RETREAT IN THE FAR EAST

To British servicemen garrisoned in Singapore between the wars (above), imperial power in the Far East seemed as pervasive and enduring as the tropical scenery. Singapore itself was a mighty bastion of the Empire, dominating the sea routes to India and Australasia. Just north of Singapore, the Malay peninsula lay under undisputed British suzerainty. To the east of Malaya, Britain held North Borneo, extending "protection" to Sarawak, which was still ruled by its own British Rajah. Off the coast of China, the Union Jack flew over the colony of Hong Kong, while on the mainland British traders and missionaries helped to shape the destiny of the world's most populous nation. But the clouds were already gathering on the far horizon and imperial tranquillity was soon to be disrupted.

By Colin Cross

At the beginning of the 20th Century, British imperialism was making swift and extensive advances in the Far East. China was humbled by the crushing of the Boxer rebellion of 1900; valuable Japanese co-operation was secured through a treaty signed in 1902; and colonial institutions seemed to be taking firm root in Malaya. Yet, by the 1970s, Britain's one remaining Far East possession was Hong Kong; she had suffered humiliating military defeats in the 1940s at the hands of her former Japanese ally; her trade with China was virtually what China, not Britain, chose to make it; and following a prolonged and murderous Communist guerrilla war, Malaya was an independent state.

Fifty years before, Britain's prospects in the area, particularly for commercial advancement, had seemed limitless. The only shadow was cast by Russia, whose own expansionist policy in the Far East offered a threat to India, the Empire's most prized possession, and menaced British trading interests in China, which included tea and opium. The Japanese also feared Russian expansion into China and Korea and the British based their Far East policy on alliance with Japan.

It was the first time the British had ever treated a non-European nation as an equal: further, it was the first treaty alliance with any country which Britain had signed since the Napoleonic wars. It was with the Japanese that the British Empire ended its traditional policy of "splendid isolation."

Ties between the two nations were already quite close. Most of the modern, efficient Japanese navy had been built in British shipyards and British officers had been prominent in training its seamen. In the year 1902 over one-fifth of Japan's exports went to countries of the British Empire and nearly 40 per cent of her imports came from them. Many Japanese visited Britain to study at first hand what was then the world's most advanced economy.

The British themselves often referred to Japan as the "England of the east," an island power like themselves. Sir Claude MacDonald, British minister in Tokyo, wrote of the "alliance between the Island Empires of the East and West." The Japanese minister in London, Count Hayashi Tadasu, who negotiated the treaty for his country, was a pronounced Anglophile who, in his memoirs, described himself as "an Englishman in mind and almost in appearance."

Japan wanted freedom of action in Korea, still an independent state, and was contending with the Russians for influence there. (In 1905 Japan was to proclaim a protectorate over Korea and in 1910 to annex it outright.) Japan also feared the British would reduce their Far Eastern fleet. The treaty was to run for five years and was thereafter subject to cancellation by either party on one year's notice. If either party started a war with a third party, the other would remain neutral. If either was attacked by two other powers, the other would come to its assistance. In time of peace, British and Japanese warships could coal in each other's harbours, a clause of particular benefit to Britain, who was short of coaling stations in the Far East.

Singapore, the greatest port of South Asia, was, however, under direct imperial control. Founded in 1819 by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles of the East India Company, it was by the 1900s being used by some 50 shipping lines. Situated at the foot of the Malay peninsula, it was the outlet to the world for the thriving Malayan rubber and tin industries. The bulk of its population was made up of Chinese immigrants, a few of whom had amassed great fortunes. (It was a curiosity that the male population of Singapore outnumbered the female by two to one: many men had come to work temporarily, leaving their families behind, or intended to get married only when they had made their fortune.)

The British had expanded northwards from their old Straits Settlement colony, composed of the East India Company's four trading emporia of Penang, Singapore, Malacca and Labuan. During the last quarter of the 19th Century they had acquired, with but one display of force, the Malayan sultanates of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang.

These were termed "protected states"; their hereditary rulers retained office and the states were not, technically, British territory. However, British "residents" acted virtually as prime ministers to the rulers and held all effective power. In 1895 the four states were federated under a "resident-general," with the capital at Kuala Lumpur, and the Malayan Civil Service was carefully modelled on the Indian Civil Service.

It recruited young British graduates to what were called "eastern cadetships." While the prestige of the Malayan Civil Service was not as high as that of its Indian counterpart, it offered what was probably a pleasanter, more easy-going career. British control of Malaya was completed in 1909 when, by treaty with their nominal suzerain, Thailand, the states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis were transferred to British "protection."

The British Empire was expanding in Malaya chiefly for economic reasons. The growth of the motor-car industry in the 1900s meant a rapidly rising demand for Malaya's main commercial crop, rubber, of which she remains the world's largest supplier. British planters carved new rubber estates out of the jungle. Managing the estates was an agreeable, profitable activity for the planters, and to work the plantations a vast labour force of Chinese and Indians was imported. (The Malayans, on the whole, preferred to work their own land rather than enter paid employment.)

Malaya became a hodge-podge of peoples: Hindu gongs and Chinese fire crackers sounded, and the smells of Indian curry and Chinese roast pork mingled. Each community, British, Malayan, Chinese and Indian, kept to itself, retaining its own language and way of life. The main non-official contact between the British and the local inhabitants arose only because British planters and officials frequently took Chinese or Malayan (but rarely Indian) mistresses. Indeed, a young man was very often advised to do so: it was the easiest way to learn the language. There were cases – Somerset Maugham wrote a short story based on one – of wives coming from Britain to join their husbands and receiving a shock when they saw the Euro-Asian faces of the village children.

Britain's interests in Malaya were

commercial. She had commercial interests in China, too, but there her missionary activities were also of great importance. Malaya was Muslim and, therefore, not strictly "pagan." As in other Muslim countries in the Empire, there was relatively little mission work. The great missionary proselytizing effort was made in China, and this undertaking was reaching its peak in the early years of the 20th Century, when Britons came not with gunboats but Bibles.

Seen in retrospect, the attempt to convert China to Christianity is an extraordinary mixture of arrogance and naïvety. China had a civilization and philosophical and religious values that extended back for 4,000 years. Many of its traditions were older and seemingly more durable than those of Europe. Yet many Westerners *did* think that China could be Christianized.

By 1906 there were 64 Protestant missionary societies working in the field – mostly British, but with a large American minority – with some 3,400 paid staff. Their converts totalled 178,000. By 1918 there were over 100 societies with 6,300 staff, and by 1925, after which the missionary movement, for internal Chinese political and military reasons, slowed down, there were more than 8,000 staff (by this time over half of whom were Americans) and a Chinese Christian community which was said to exceed 800,000.

The missionaries were encouraged by the fact that many Chinese institutions were decaying as a result of contact with the technologically more advanced West. Indeed, a generation did arise in which Christian Chinese, most notably Chiang Kai-shek, played prominent roles. But Christianity was not to be the true line of Chinese development, and the missionary effort helped to foster the delusion – suffered, above all, by Americans – that China could be encouraged to become a stable, middle-class democracy.

The missionaries were free from legal persecution because of the privileges of "extra-territoriality" – the exemption from local law and law enforcement agencies which had been secured in the 19th Century – but they were preyed

An English missionary and his wife (centre) pose for this pre-1914 picture with Christian Chinese clergy in the Hangchow hospital garden.

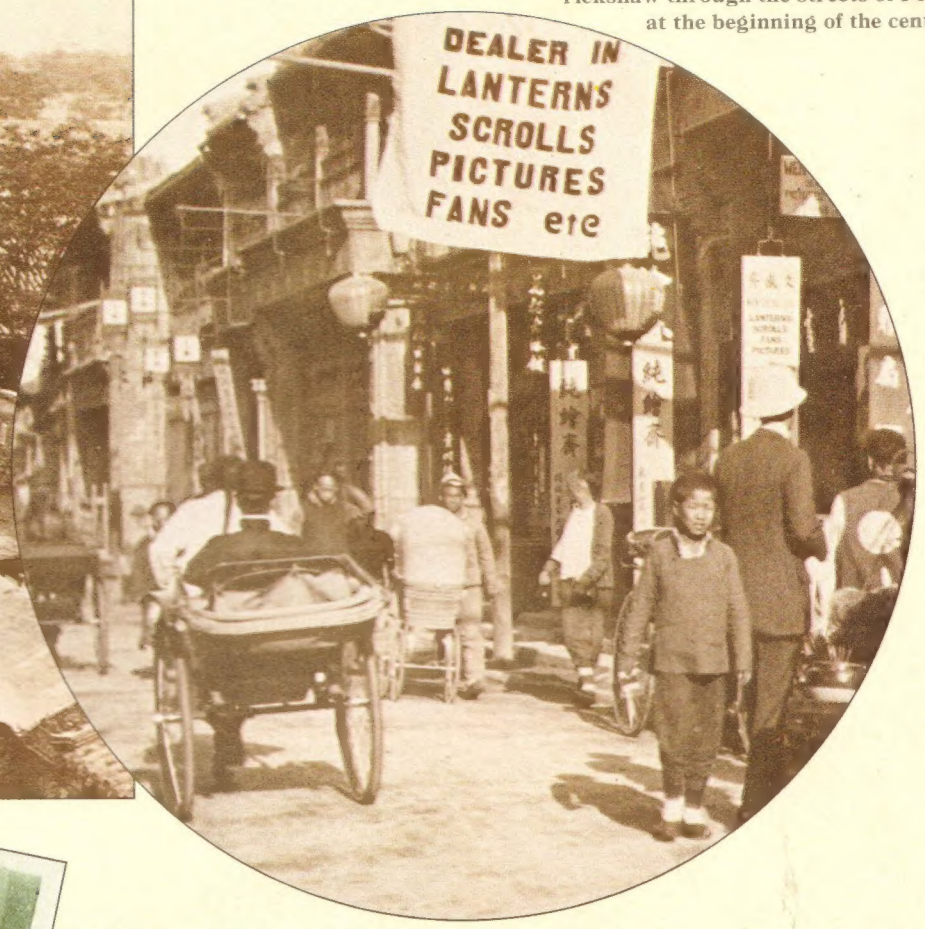
"FOREIGN DEVILS"

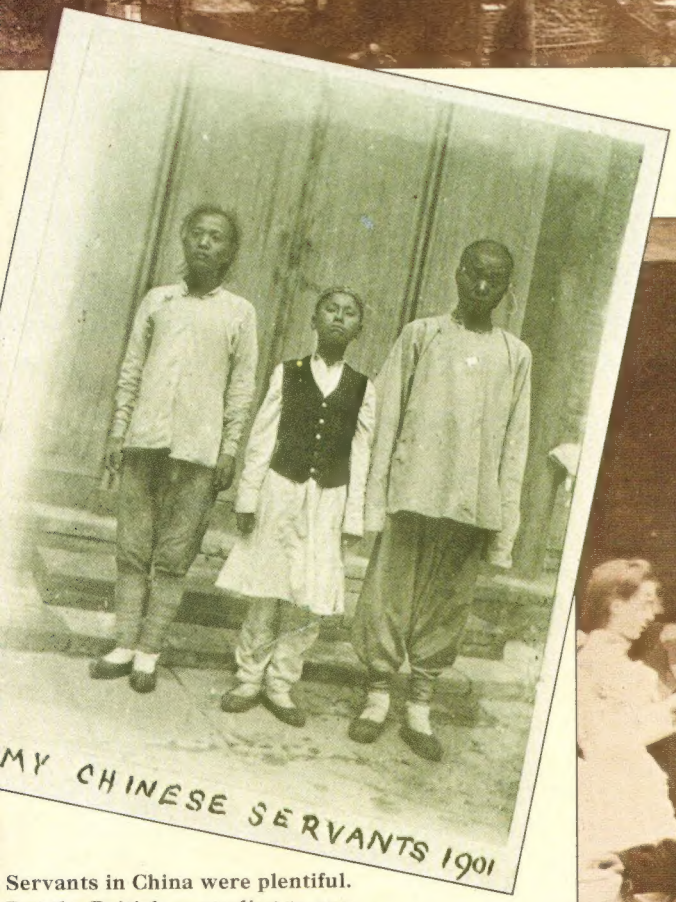
By the end of the 19th Century Britain had succeeded in creating a massive commercial empire in China. Her businessmen enjoyed extra-territorial rights in major ports; her officials ran the Chinese Maritime Customs Service; her nationals advised the Chinese Fleet; and her gunboats protected trade on the Yangtse River.

When the fanatical Boxer nationalists attempted to drive out the "Foreign Devils" in 1900, they were crushed by an international force, including a contingent of British troops. Despite the Boxers' defeat, Sir Robert Hart, head of the Chinese Customs, predicted that the Chinese nationalists of the future would "take back from foreigners everything foreigners have taken from them and pay off old grudges with interest."

The Chinese capital of Peking in 1901 still had a rural atmosphere.

A shop sign in English greets a bowler-hatted British businessman as he rides by rickshaw through the streets of Peking at the beginning of the century.





Servants in China were plentiful. But the British, according to one observer, tended to treat them "not as dogs, because in that case one would whistle to them and pat them, but as machines, with which one can have no communion."

The British take tea with local dignitaries. Socializing with the Chinese élite was frequent.

The Customs House in Shanghai, with its odd blend of architectural styles, remained until the Second World War the symbol of Britain's commercial pre-eminence in China.

upon and even murdered by private individuals who resented attempts by "foreign devils" to change their country.

"A revolution of the most vital nature is in progress," wrote Alexander Michie, a historian of the Victorian English in China, in 1900, "and is being pushed on with all the energy which Christian, combined with ecclesiastical and political, zeal can throw into the work. So formidable, indeed, have the missionaries become that most of the provincial authorities are afraid as well as jealous of them."

Missionary education had its quaint side. British and American curricula were often transplanted to China with only minimum adjustment. As an American observer put it in 1929: "Every Mission School was an instrument of denationalization. The pupils were taught, not as Chinese children preparing to share in the life of the Chinese race, but as American children. . . . Of literature, the Chinese children learned English literature. Of history, they learned American history. Except in the English mission schools, which were a minority and could not command such lavish donations from the pious at home, the cosmology was that of a world which began in all earnestness in 1776. And it is not too much of a caricature to say that thousands of Chinese grew to the age of sixteen without any clear knowledge that there had ever existed on this planet more than three men worthy of emulation – Christ, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln."

But this is not to say that the intellectual and moral standard of most missionaries was not a high one. Many felt the "call" for China and only the best were chosen. They were virtually all graduates, excepting some wives working alongside their husbands, and they needed the intellectual capacity to master the Chinese language. There were many "medical missionaries" – that is, trained medical practitioners who were often, also, ordained as ministers.

Others were schoolteachers. The British missionaries customarily worked five or six years "in the field" and then sailed back to "furlough" in Britain, where they gave fund-raising lectures. In China they usually lived in groups in "mission houses," which were prominent buildings in hundreds of Chinese towns and cities. The London Missionary Society, for example, operated across most of China: its most southerly centre, at Fatshan, was a distance of some 2,000 miles from its most northerly, at Chaoyang, and its most easterly, at Shanghai, was some 1,500 miles from its most westerly, at Chungking.

Inquisitive, indigent, sick and hostile Chinese flocked around the missions. Many of the Chinese converts lapsed and many became Christians for what their teachers considered wrong motives. One missionary, John Parker, reported: "A man comes to us apparently sincere. He attends the inquirers' class and then gives out that he is an 'associate' with us. This confession now brings him not persecution but prestige. He then goes to someone who owes him money and threatens him in the name of the Church, or in other cases he levies blackmail; and these poor, ignorant people, when they hear that a foreigner is at the back of it, empty their pockets."

Another missionary, Nelson Bitton, took a slightly more optimistic view in 1902: "We have the hearing ear before us and wait for the understanding heart. One wishes it could be said that there appears any spirit of earnest inquiry into truth for the Gospel's sake on the part of the Chinese. There isn't. A general disposition to inquire into the bearing of the Gospel upon the power and prosperity of the foreigner is evident, and though this

Europeans in Peking exchange casual greetings, apparently unconcerned by the bound and

decapitated row of Chinese who have fallen victims to the Nationalist revolution of October, 1911.

is a low motive it may be that God will use it to bring them to Christ."

An outstanding example of an effective missionary-educational career was that of Lavington Hart. He gained a first class in the Cambridge science tripos and became a lecturer in physics. He began preaching in his spare time, but this did not satisfy him. In 1892 he went to China as a full-time missionary and ten years later founded "The Hall of New Learning" at Tientsin. It was run as an English public school adapted to Chinese conditions, and for a generation it was a kind of local Eton, producing many politicians and diplomats. Hart, a versatile man, designed most of the architecture of the school himself, modelling it on St. John's College, Cambridge.

One of the most remarkable things about it was that it was supported largely by funds raised within China itself. But however important "The Hall of New Learning" was educationally, it was none too successful in securing Christian converts. Between 1922 and 1941, some 300 students accepted baptism, but this was among thousands of possible converts. Hart himself retired in 1930 after 38 years given to China.

Almost all British missionaries in China were Protestants. The Roman Catholic missions were predominantly French, with Germans and Italians also active. The two Christian faiths pursued fundamentally different approaches and were quite often at odds with each other. The Protestants concentrated principally on the educated classes, in the hope that if they could win the Chinese élite, the rest of China would automatically follow. They also issued masses of written material, an approach of which the Roman Catholics disapproved.

The Catholics discouraged individual conversion if it meant that the convert, because of his Christianity, would be socially isolated. The Catholic aim was to create Christian communities among the peasants. They sought, and with some success, to win over whole villages, especially the poorest and most backward. On occasion they actually bought land so that their converts could live together in a Catholic society. In terms of numbers, the Roman Catholics were more successful than the Protestants in gaining converts; the Protestants had far more significant political influence.

But in 1911 the old imperial Chinese framework finally collapsed, with consequences that were to be disastrous to British interests in the country. On October 10, 1911, a revolution began. Three months later a provisional government was formed and on February 2, 1912, an official edict announced the abdication of the last Manchu Emperor, the six-year-old Henry P'u Yi.

The revolution was not a result of any direct foreign intervention: nevertheless, it was the foreigners who had contributed to the general decay of Chinese institutions. Dynasties had fallen often in the past but there had always been successor dynasties to replace them. This time there was no real successor, and China was to have no truly effective central government until the Communist victory in 1949.

Sun Yat-sen, the leading political figure in the revolution, was born in 1866 to a Cantonese peasant family which had adopted Christianity. He qualified as a medical doctor in a Hong Kong college and, after practising for some years in China, travelled widely in Europe, the United States and Japan. In London in 1896 Sun, already deeply committed to radical politics, was involved in a bizarre incident with the Chinese imperial legation. Sun had been befriended by Sir James Cantile, a former lecturer at the medical school in Hong Kong, who entertained the young man almost daily.

One day, Sun recalled, Sir James "alluded to the Chinese Legation being in the neighbourhood and jokingly suggested that I might go around and call there; whereat his wife remarked, 'You had better not. Don't go near it; they'll catch you and ship you off to China.' We all enjoyed a good laugh over the remark."

But one Sunday soon after, Sun was approached by a Chinese – "in a surreptitious manner from behind" – and "half-jokingly, half-persistently compelled" to enter his lodgings for a chat. The lodgings turned out to be part of the Chinese legation and Sun, upon whose head the Chinese had put a price of £100,000, learned that he was to be shipped back to China for decapitation. He managed, however, to smuggle out a message to Sir James who made such a disturbance in the press and at the Foreign Office that Sun was released.

Sun worked indefatigably against the Chinese imperial system, and consequently, perhaps without intending it, against British imperial interests in China as well. He organized plot after plot. When the October revolution began he was abroad, but hastened back to China where, on January 5, 1912, at the request of the national convention in Nanking, he became Provisional President.

The following month, however, he resigned in favour of the military commander, Yuan Shih-k'ai, in the expectation that Yuan would establish the republic which had been proclaimed in the Emperor's abdication edict. Yuan had no intention of doing so, and in 1913 Sun started another revolution against Yuan: the latter easily suppressed it and Sun fled to Japan.

For almost the whole of its existence, until the Communist takeover, the Chinese republic was run by the military, a form of régime which Sun supported as a necessary transitional phase. His theory was that under strong military control his organization, the Kuomintang (literally, "National People's Party"), would carry out an intensive political education to prepare China for democracy. Sun repudiated both Marxism and capitalism, proposing to develop a distinctly Chinese form of economic structure in which the state would help to foster and organize large-scale industry.

This world-famous Singapore hotel is named after the city's founder, Sir Thomas Raffles.

The First World War, unlike the Second, had only minimal effects on the Far East. The Allied victory did, however, lead to a redistribution of imperial possessions. German colonies in the area were parcelled out among Japan, Australia and New Zealand. In 1923 there occurred another event that was to have a profound effect on imperial interests in the Far East: Britain ended her alliance with Japan. This was largely the result of American pressure.

At the end of the war Britain, the United States and Japan each had vast naval building programmes still in progress and each feared to stop unless the others did. The Anglo-Japanese alliance was used by the Congressional "Big Navy" lobby to justify the American programme, although in December, 1920, Britain denied that the pact would be valid in the event of war between the United States and Japan.

But American public opinion, Congress and President Harding wanted further reassurance against Anglo-Japanese naval dominance in the Pacific. A conference on naval limitation, "in connection with which Pacific and Far Eastern questions could also be discussed," was convened in Washington in November, 1921. A 5:5:3 ratio of capital ships was agreed upon by Britain, the United States and Japan, as well as other limitations on Pacific fortifications, including those in Hong Kong, but excluding Singapore and Hawaii. (In the event, this ratio ensured Japan's superiority in her home western Pacific waters.)

The Anglo-Japanese alliance was also to be terminated and on the ratification of the Four-Power Treaty between Britain, the United States, France and Japan on August 17, 1923, the old pact was formally abrogated. Now that British warships could no longer rely upon Japanese harbours, they needed a secure new base in the Far East and intensive work began on turning Singapore into an impregnable fortress.

Two huge docks, each capable of taking a battleship, were constructed. Great concrete emplacements held 18-inch guns, said to be the largest in the world. Singapore was considered to be the "Gibraltar of the east" and was intended to under-

pin British power and safeguard the approaches to India and Australia. The fortification of Singapore was the largest construction task of its kind in the entire history of the British Empire and was completed in 1938. It had, however, the staggering weakness that the defences were against sea attack only. Nobody seems to have considered the possibility of an attack from the Malayan mainland.

It was because of the Americans that the British had given up the Japanese alliance and their hope was that the Americans would support them in the Far East. Their hope was never properly fulfilled. The Americans were deeply interested in trade with China and they had an almost sentimental, paternalistic attitude towards the country. They also had an instinctive distaste for British imperialism. But although there was a dispute in 1929 about the number of naval cruisers which Britain, the United States and Japan should be allowed to build, British policy in the Far East was to follow the American lead.

As an official in the Far Eastern section of the British War Office remarked: "Instead of standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States as equals, our policy was to stand behind her like a well-trained dog." Such a stance was unwise as well as inelegant, for as late as 1941 there was no guarantee that the United States would go to war if Japan attacked the British Far Eastern colonies. Indeed, there were powerful Americans who believed that Asian countries should produce George Washingtons to combat British imperialism.

The main concerns of the Empire, as it moved towards its end in the Far East, were with China, Japan and the United States. But there was one area of the Empire where there was some light relief – the tiny state of Sarawak, in Borneo. It had a population of half a million and an area of 48,000 square miles. It also remained as the private domain of the British Brooke family.

The first white Rajah of Sarawak was the 19th-Century adventurer, Sir James Brooke. He had been appointed Rajah of a large area of Sarawak in 1841 by the Sultan of Brunei, then the overlord, as a reward for his services in putting down Chinese pirates and rebel tribesmen. Brooke rule was, by local standards, efficient, and during the years he and his heirs extended their control over Brunei territory, under the excuse that the Sultan's rule was ineffective or oppressive. In 1864 the British government recognized Sarawak as an independent domain (the United States had done so in 185[illegible]) and in 1888 an agreement with the British placed it under British protection, although the Brooke family retained control over all domestic affairs.

The first Rajah had been emasculated by a bullet during fighting in Burma and had no children. Thus, to the accompaniment of great family rows, he chose his sister's son, Charles Johnson, as his heir, and Charles added the surname Brooke to his own name. Charles Johnson Brooke reigned from 1868 until his death in 1917 at the age of 87. He was a pompous

Members and their wives gather for a special meeting of the Singapore Cricket Club, which was founded half a century earlier in 1852.

chilly man with a most startling face.

For years, following the loss of his eye in an accident, he lived with one empty socket. Then, during a visit to London he stopped on impulse at a taxidermist's and bought an eye intended for a stuffed albatross. Wearing this in his empty eye socket gave Brooke a wild look, and since, in later years, he also became stone deaf, encounters with him tended to be nerve-racking affairs.

In Sarawak he inaugurated a waterworks and a wireless transmitter. He believed that it was his duty to shelter the head-hunting Dayak tribesmen from the realities of the world and would not allow their primitive lives to be changed by commercial developments or consumer goods from the West.

The old autocrat had three sons who were so shy of women that, at one point, they looked like becoming permanent bachelors. Then their mother, the Ranee (she was estranged from her husband and lived apart in England), recruited an orchestra consisting entirely of eligible young women, and had it perform before her sons.

The choice of the eldest, Vyner, fell on the drummer, Sylvia Brett, daughter of Viscount Esher, and as a token of his love he sent her a silver model of her drum. Vyner was so shy that he bought a book of jokes on their honeymoon and read from it rather than make conversation. When, in 1917, his ceremonial installation as Rajah was due, he tried to duck out at the last moment and have his wife represent him.

Once installed, however, Vyner proved to be a conscientious ruler. He worked to suppress slavery and head hunting and sat as judge in his own court. He mixed with the tribal chiefs, drank their potent liquor and got to know them well. In his *Who's Who* entry, describing his qualifications, Vyner wrote "understands natives." Some of his more primitive subjects, such as the Dayaks and Kayans, believed that he had an interview with God every day: they asked him whether God was clean-shaven or wore a beard. His answer is not known.

His personal habits were also somewhat eccentric: he would stroll around the garden of his riverside palace accompanied by pet monkeys and, occasionally, a pet boa constrictor or porcupine.

Sarawak made headlines in the British press in the 1930s when Rajah Vyner's three daughters entered British society. The newspapers, dubbing them, incorrectly, "the three princesses," eagerly chronicled their doings. They even inspired a popular song, *My Sarawak*. One married an all-in wrestler; another, the bandleader, Harry Roy.

Back in Sarawak, Vyner took on an official named Gerald MacBryan who had the most grandiose ambitions. He became a Muslim, went on pilgrimage to Mecca and dreamed of creating a united Muslim empire extending from Morocco to the Philippines, with himself ruling it from Sarawak. However, MacBryan went clinically insane and the last great event of Brooke rule was the introduction of a constitution, with a representative assembly. This was Vyner Brooke's gift to his people in 1941 after a century of family rule.

The Brooke girls made headlines in the 1930s: British imperial interests in the Far East did not. The Chinese Empire had collapsed and, although neither the British nor the Chinese knew it, Britain's imperial interests in China had been doomed from the start of the revolution in 1911. The most significant, but by no means the only, catalytic force was the Nationalist movement created by the radical leader, Sun Yat-sen.

After the failure of his attempt against Yuan, Sun, from his exile in Japan, became the leading ideologue of a "New China," which was to be free from foreign penetration and control and develop as a modern nation-state. Sun's three great principles were "Nationalism, Democracy, Socialism."

He was a consummate agitator and propagandist rather than an organizer, and was particularly skilful at attracting money from Chinese living abroad, especially those in the United States. The Peking government, although it continued to receive international recognition, had no authority outside its own immediate area, and China was actually

controlled by a number of war lords, each supreme only in his own province.

In 1917, after trying to make himself Emperor, Yuan died. Returning from exile, Sun attempted to set up an independent republic in south China, but his alliances with the local war lords were shifting and it was not until 1923 that he properly established himself, although even then his authority did not extend much beyond Canton.

In that year he asked the Soviet leader, Lenin, for assistance. Lenin sent him the skilled revolutionary, Michael Borodin, and a number of Red Army officers. In view of future relationships between Britain and China, the choice of Borodin may seem ironic. He had emigrated to the United States from Russia, but after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 had returned home and then worked as a Communist agent in several countries, including Great Britain. In 1922 he had been sentenced in Glasgow to six months' imprisonment on a charge of stirring up revolution and was deported by the British government. The next year he was in China.

Sailors with fixed bayonets march through Shanghai in 1927 in a display of British might.

Sun had no desire to create a Communist China; he was merely prepared to accept help from wherever it was available. But as part of the arrangement with Lenin he was obliged to admit to membership of the Kuomintang the infant Chinese Communist Party, one of whose founders in 1921 had been the young Mao Tse-tung.

With Soviet help, Sun established at Canton, in 1924, the Whampoa Military Academy, a school intended to train a new Nationalist army to break the power of the war lords and to gain control over the whole of China. The first principal of the academy, and one of the first major-generals in the new army, was Chiang Kai-shek, then aged 36. Chiang had served for two years in the Japanese army and was determined to bring Japanese standards of discipline and austerity to China.

In 1923 he was sent by Sun to Russia to study Soviet institutions, particularly the Red Army. Compared to his great antagonist, Mao, who had never been out of China in his life, Chiang was a travelled man. In 1927 he became a Christian, largely because of his marriage to Mayling Soong, a Christian who had been educated in America. Mayling Soong's sister had married Sun Yet-sen.

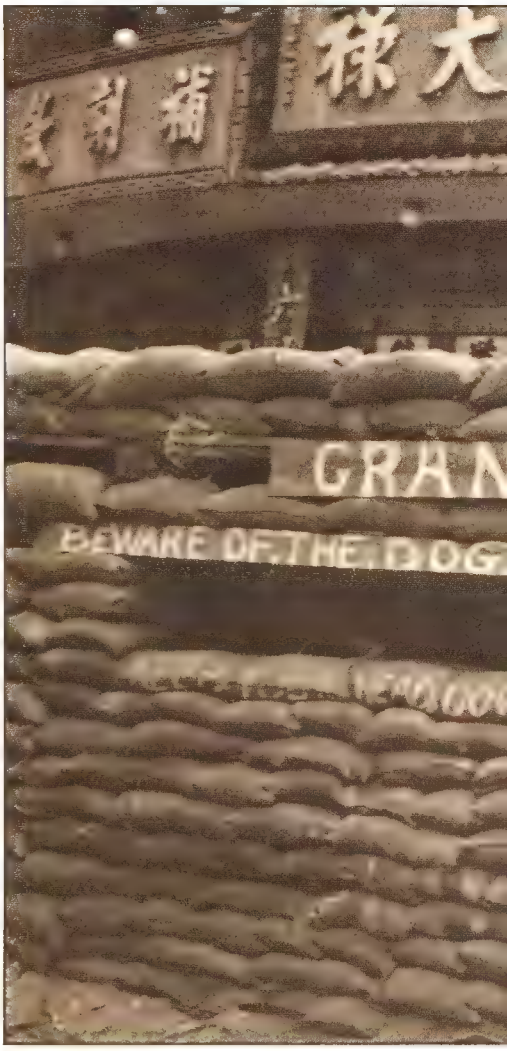
Sun died in 1925 and Chiang emerged as his successor. The mid-1920s were a period of Nationalist military gains and rising Nationalist resentment against foreign interference in Chinese affairs. At first, this resentment focused on the British. In May, 1925, nine Chinese were killed when police commanded by a British officer fired into a crowd that was attacking the prison at Shanghai's International Settlement. (The settlement was a foreign enclave that had been set up by Britain and America in 1863 to safeguard their commercial interests in Shanghai and was administered jointly by both countries until the outbreak of the Second World War.)

Following the shootings, there was a Nationalist boycott of British goods strikes in British-owned factories, and riots in Shanghai, Hong Kong and elsewhere. The following year British gunboats bombarded Wanhsien, a city on the Yangste River within the British "sphere of influence," and a mob then occupied the British consulate in Hankow

The thriving Chinese port of Shanghai provided a living for 11,000 British businessmen before the Second World War.

BATTLE ZONE

When China was opened up to Western penetration in 1842, Britain extracted trading concessions in several ports. The most important was Shanghai, where, in 1863, the British and American concessions were merged into a self-governing International Settlement. In 1932 Shanghai suddenly became a flashpoint in the rising conflict between China and Japan. A few months before, Japan had occupied Manchuria and in January, 1932, her forces landed at Hongkew, in the International Settlement, and launched an attack on Chinese troops in the area. As fighting and bombing raged, American and British reinforcements were landed and the American Asiatic Squadron was dispatched to Shanghai. But although both countries protested against Japan's abuse of the International Settlement, they remained strictly neutral. Isolationist America opposed tough action and Britain was unwilling to antagonize Japan without firm American backing. At the end of February Britain managed to mediate a truce between the two sides; a demilitarized zone was set up around the International Settlement and the British emergency force departed.



A Chinese Boy Scout (above) gives first aid to a mother wounded while fleeing with her child from the fighting in Shanghai.

Lightly-armed Chinese troops (left) march through Shanghai early in 1932, determined to resist the powerful Japanese invaders.

A British soldier stands guard outside his Shanghai "hotel" during the Sino-Japanese conflict. The neutral British decorated their sandbag defences with the same kind of ironic slogans they had devised for their trenches during the First World War.

Helmeted Japanese soldiers, equipped with modern weapons and battledress, shelter behind a sandbag barricade in Shanghai, waiting for orders to launch a fresh assault

Shadow of the Rising Sun

In July, 1937, hostility between China and Japan again burst into open war and in August fighting broke out between Chinese and Japanese troops on the perimeter of the International Settlement in Shanghai. Destruction and chaos increased when almost 2,000 Chinese refugees were killed during an accidental Chinese bombing raid on the Settlement. European shops closed, the Country Club was converted into a hospital and the exclusive Shanghai Club, which by tradition admitted women only for the annual ball, became a reception centre for European families wishing to evacuate the beleaguered city. Most of the merchants, however, refused to abandon their businesses and lived in a state of partial siege until the Chinese were bombarded into submission in November. The Japanese celebrated with a great victory parade through Shanghai. For China, the event marked humiliating defeat; for Britain, it was an ominous sign that her long years of profitable and unchallenged supremacy in the Far East were coming to an end.

A British soldier examines a Chinese hand grenade – nicknamed a "potato masher."

Off-duty British troops in Shanghai in 1937 play mah-jong. A Western version of the game was devised by an American living in the city.

A bombing raid brings devastation to Shanghai's King Edward VII Avenue in August, 1937. Inaccurate bombing by Chinese planes added to the destruction and suffering caused by frequent Japanese air attacks and naval bombardments.

A member of the British volunteer force recruited to help defend the International Settlement in Shanghai waits in readiness by his armoured car.

II. Clash of the Island Empires

Britain proposed to the United States and Japan that each send military reinforcements to Shanghai to act jointly in their common interests. The Americans and Japanese refused, but Britain dispatched three brigades, which successfully defended the International Settlement in March, 1927, when the Nationalists attempted to take it over. Both the Americans and the Japanese did later send in troops, and British and American warships fired on Nanking later that month, saving many Western lives when the victorious and vengeance-seeking Nationalists sacked and looted the city, including the foreign community. Six foreigners were captured and killed in what was widely held to be a Communist-inspired attack.

The situation of the Anglo-French International Settlement in the Nationalist stronghold of Canton was particularly perilous. The settlement was located on the island of Shameen, in the Pearl River, and was connected to the mainland by only two bridges. At the Canton end of the bridges, Nationalist sentries searched everyone going to the island, confiscating any items that could be used to supply the settlement's needs. Not even a cigarette or a newspaper were allowed through. There were cases of Chinese snipers climbing to rooftops in the city to pick off people in the Shameen streets. On the island, the bridges were guarded by machine-guns, barbed wire and blockhouses, manned day and night.

British policy was not to counter-attack but to offer to renounce all special privileges in China the moment there was a government that could maintain order throughout the country. When, in 1929, the Nationalists peremptorily demanded the abolition of privileges, the British replied that on January 1, 1930, they would begin "the process of abolishing extra-territoriality." This avoided an outright refusal but at the same time left the British government room for diplomatic manoeuvre.

These were small concessions by the British (and other foreign powers), but extra-territoriality was not finally abolished until the Second World War, when the Japanese handed the Shanghai settlement over to Chinese administration, under, of course, ultimate Japanese guidance and control.

The Nationalists, led by Chiang, reached Peking in June, 1928. In May, however, a force of 4,000 Japanese regulars, most of them recently dispatched, had driven a newly-installed Chinese garrison from Tsinan, the capital of Shangtung province, near the Japanese "sphere of influence" in Manchuria. This was the start of Sino-Japanese hostilities, which, in 1937, escalated into full-scale war, with Japan determined to take over the whole of China.

With the capture of Peking, Chiang, whose capital was at Nanking, established a greater degree of central control over China than had been known for a generation. To be sure, there were many war lords, whom he had neutralized rather than crushed, and Manchuria was in a state of virtual – and chaotic – independence, with China, Russia and Japan still contending for control of its territory, above all of its ports and rail lines. There were also the Communists, with an independent army, although, in 1927, Chiang had bloodily purged them from the Kuomintang.

Nevertheless, Chiang's writ did run far and he had ambitious schemes for road building, improved education, industrialization and social welfare. The great weaknesses of his government were corruption and the use of bribery, but it could, perhaps, be argued that at that stage only bribery could keep the administration running.

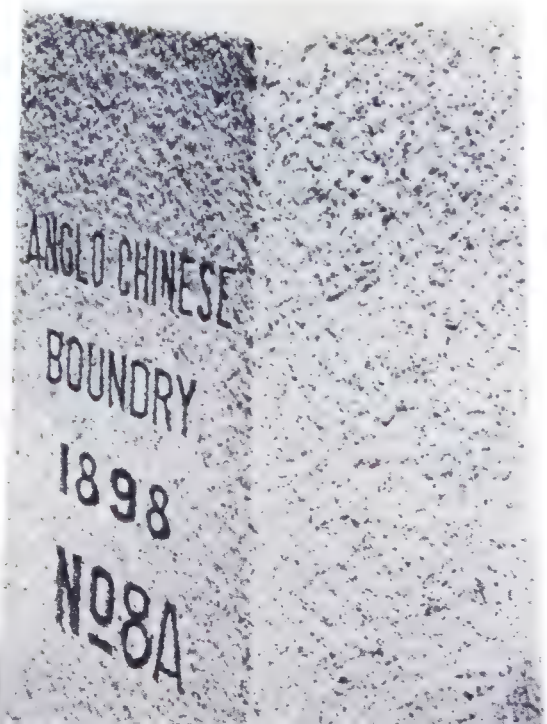
As his foreign minister Chiang chose Wellington Koo, who, as his name indicates, was Westernized, and made an excellent impression at the League of Nations and in the United States. Chiang, having shed the Communists, moved into close association with the United States, and consequently Britain, too, lent him her support.

The Western relationship with Japan also changed during the 1920s, although the change was a gradual one. Immediately after the First World War, Britain and Japan remained friendly. During a world tour in 1921 Crown Prince Hirohito visited Britain. The first member of the imperial family to travel abroad, he remembered the visit to Britain with such pleasure that he longed to repeat it, as he eventually did in 1972.

Hirohito, representative of the monarchy that had provided the stable framework for Japan's rapid industrialization, regarded himself as a man of peace. On coming to the throne in 1926 he announced that his reign would be called "The Era of Radiant Peace," and his intention was sincere.

But there were other forces at work in Japan, and by the 1930s they were in the ascendancy. The result was to be war between the two "Island Empires" of Britain and Japan and a paradoxical conclusion. Japan's imperial designs for a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" were to be frustrated by Britain and her victorious allies. But Britain was also to lose virtually all her territories and her commercial advantages in the Far East, and the Chinese Communists were to defeat the western-supported Nationalists – a result that might have been avoided had it not been for the world war.

In the 1920s the Japanese disliked being categorized with such colonial peoples as the Indians or the Malayans: Japan was herself a great power, comparable with Britain or France. Japan began to think of herself as the leader of Pan-Asia against the forces of white imperialism. Western support for Chiang after 1928 infuriated the Japanese, who were attempting to assert for eastern Asia a "Monroe Doctrine" akin to that asserted by the United States in central and southern America. Just as the Americans would permit no foreign interference in the affairs of their southern neighbours, but were apt to interfere themselves, so the Japanese claimed a similar right in their own neighbourhood.



This boundary stone (mis-spelled) divides Communist China from the British-leased New Territories. The stone is inscribed with the date at which Britain's 99-years lease of the mainland Territories began.

Refugees who have been authorized to cross from Red China into Hong Kong queue with their belongings at a railway bridge near the frontier.

There was a neurotic atmosphere in the Japan of those days, with political assassinations by nationalist extremists and frenetic demands from middle- and junior-rank army officers that Japan should grasp her "destiny." In 1931, after a minor disorder, the Japanese occupied Manchuria. The original decision to do so seems to have been made by an army commander on the spot, but the Tokyo government then declared Manchuria an independent state – Manchukuo – and no longer part of China.

The former "boy emperor," P'u Yi, was named as its head, but real power remained with the Japanese. (P'u Yi was captured by the Russians in 1945 and returned to China in 1950, where the Communists tried him as a war criminal. In 1959 he was pardoned and given a minor government job. He died in Peking on October 17, 1967.)

Manchukuo received no international recognition. When the League of Nations condemned the Japanese action, the Japanese felt that their policies were hopelessly misunderstood and that they were expected to conform to higher standards of conduct than any other country. In March, 1933, Japan resigned from the League, her delegation head, Yatuse Matsuoka, declaring, as he left the assembly: "Let him who is guiltless cast the first stone."

Japan thereafter moved towards an association with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In the 1920s Japan had sympathized with Chinese Nationalist opposition to European domination, but this pro-Chinese attitude changed to stark hostility when the Nationalists appeared to threaten Japan's own Asian ambitions. In 1932 Japan bombed Shanghai and in 1937 went to war with a view to dividing China into a number of Japanese satellite states.

Japanese aggression in China put the British Empire in the Far East in extreme danger, especially in 1938–39, when the British were finally abandoning their policy of German appeasement. But few in Britain seemed to realize the full strength of the Japanese threat. There were several reasons for this failure. One was over-estimation of the fighting prowess of Chiang's Nationalists: Japan, it was believed, might be bogged down in China for years, impotent to undertake other aggressive enterprises.

Again, Japan was embroiled with the

Soviet Union. Severe fighting broke out on the frontier of eastern Siberia and Manchukuo in July–August 1938; a truce was arranged, but the two countries were virtually at war. Then there was India, where the independence movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, was diverting imperial attention: compared with India, the East Asian colonies seemed untroubled. Finally, by 1938 "Fortress Singapore" had been transformed into what seemed an unconquerable bastion.

More subtle, and much harder to assess, was a slackening of the old British imperialistic will to win and to hold political control. To many, the imperial ideal seemed less worth fighting for: it is significant that when Singapore surrendered in February, 1942, it did so to inferior Japanese forces and after only minimal fighting.

Even after war had started, the old routine of business or administration by day followed by the "sundowner" on the veranda and a leisurely dinner party, continued. Most of the British in the Far East – particularly in China – lived only for the day when they had made their fortune or qualified for their pensions and could return home.

The British declaration of war on Germany in September, 1939, at first made little difference in the Far East. Yet by then Japan had occupied most of eastern and southern China and in 1940 set up a government at Nanking under Wang Ching Wei, a former close associate of Chiang Kai-shek. In 1943 Wang was to sign a treaty of alliance with Japan and to join the war on her side.

Chiang's Nationalists had retreated westwards from their old capital and established a new one at Chungking, where they were largely cut off from the rest of the world: except by air, the only access was through Burma.

In 1940 the Germans occupied much of western Europe, leaving the French and Dutch Far Eastern colonies at the mercy of the Axis Powers. The Vichy French were forced to accept a Japanese occupation of French Indo-China (Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos), though the oil-hungry Japanese waited for another two years before occupying the oil-rich Dutch East Indies (Indonesia): shortage of oil was a constant Japanese problem, every drop having to be imported.

The British, in an attempt to placate Japan, temporarily closed the "Burma Road" to Nationalist China in July, 1940, but reopened it in October after Japan joined Germany and Italy in the ten-year Tripartite Pact. The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, also announced that he would regard any Japanese attack upon the Americans in the Far East as an attack on Britain. The American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, gave no reciprocal guarantee.

By the outbreak of the European war in September, 1939, Britain had realized that she was virtually impotent in the Far East and would have to depend upon the United States. In July of that year the Americans suddenly abrogated the commercial treaty of 1911 with Japan, severely interrupting supplies of oil, iron, copper and machinery that the Japanese needed for their war in China. In 1940 Britain began staff talks with the Dutch on how they could defend their Far Eastern interests and the United States joined the talks.

Japan and Soviet Russia signed a neutrality agreement in April, 1941, and by July the Japanese had almost swallowed French Indo-China. Both the United States and Britain froze Japanese assets and the United States imposed an embargo on oil exports to Japan. The Japanese then began negotiating with the Dutch in the East Indies for oil, but failed to get the desired concessions.

Throughout 1941 the United States and Japan had been holding diplomatic discussions, but these were of no avail. The chief points of dispute were the Japanese occupation of China, freedom of trade with Chiang, whom the Americans wanted the Japanese to recognize as ruler of China, and Japanese membership of the Tripartite Pact, from which the United States insisted she withdraw.

The Japanese High Command had no confidence in diplomacy and was able to impose its will on the civilian politicians and even the Emperor. It insisted that if by October, 1941, the talks had failed, then Japan should go to war with the United States and Britain. Hirohito managed several times to get the deadline extended, but by November 1, 1941, Japanese Combined Fleet Operational Order Number 1 – the plan for the attack on Pearl Harbor, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies – had been issued.

The formal decision to strike was taken on December 1, 1941, and on December 7 the attacks were made on Pearl Harbor, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya and elsewhere in the Pacific. The following day the United States and Britain formally declared war on Japan. Two days later the Japanese attacked Burma; Hong Kong fell by Christmas; Malaya and Singapore the following February.

The Japanese had seen this as their moment to strike out, not only for oil, not only for China, but to rid East Asia of white imperialism. Japan's army, navy and air force had fanatical enthusiasm and were superbly trained and led. This combination of morale and efficiency in the opening months of the war enabled Japan to occupy Hong Kong, Malaya – including Singapore – Burma, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines. Rajah Vyner Brooke was in Australia when the Japanese invaded Sarawak. But they found his love letters to his various mistresses and pinned them to the walls of his palace.

It could be argued that the Japanese fought the Second World War under a delusion. This was that once the Europeans and the Americans had been cleared out of the Far East, they would never return. In a sense this was, of course, correct. The Japanese victories so shattered the mystique of the "white man" that any post-war venture in old-style colonialism was impossible.

But in the immediate aftermath of Japan's crushing military victories, the British and Americans had no intention of renouncing their stake in the area. Their pride and their trade interests were involved and they believed that the Japanese were criminals who should be defeated at almost any cost. Even in 1942, when Japanese success was greatest, the Anglo-Americans were fighting back: in May Allied naval and air power frustrated a possible invasion of Australia at the battle of the Coral Sea, and in November American troops took Guadalcanal ★

MALAYAN EMERGENCY

In June, 1948, Malayan Communists, encouraged by post-war chaos and inspired by Mao Tse-tung's success in China, launched a guerrilla war to drive the British out of Malaya. For years, estate owners – like the one shown on this and the following pages – turned their plantations into armed camps. But by the mid-1950s a combination of tough military and administrative measures had the guerrillas on the run.

A British rubber planter, A.S. Taylor, reads a daily news sheet about terrorist activities. His windows are wire-netted against bomb attacks and his loaded Bren is beside him.

Communist Offensive

The Malayan People's Anti-British Army, as the 5,000 Communist insurgents called themselves, were well prepared: while fighting the Japanese, they had hidden caches of arms in the jungle which they now retrieved. At 8.30 a.m. on June 16, 1948, they attacked a rubber estate in Perak, murdering three British planters.

Estate workers and loyal villagers were primary targets of the Communist offensive. In a typical incident in 1949 five terrorists descended on a village, seized the headman and demanded money. He refused, and in front of the assembled villagers, both his arms were viciously struck off with a razor-sharp Malayan *parang*.

The British estates in outlying areas became communities under siege, owners defending their land with barbed wire and searchlights, and turning their cars into miniature tanks. It was all to little avail, for there was as yet no means of hitting back at the guerrilla bases.

Taylor (above), a revolver strapped to his side, checks a latex yield on his rubber plantation during the Malayan Emergency.

A bodyguard armed with a sub-machine gun (left) patrols with Taylor as he makes his daily rounds to check on outlying areas of his estate. Ambushes of plantation workers were a favourite terrorist tactic.

Taylor holds a roll call of his estate workers to make sure all are safe and also to question them about the possible presence of terrorists in the nearby jungle.

Armed sentries at a fortified roadside guard post check Taylor's car. Such checkpoints were intended to prevent infiltration, but were themselves liable to attack by Communists raiding for arms.

A sentry watches out for terrorist raiders while British estate managers eat dinner.

The British Hit Back

The Communist leader, Chin Peng, a 26-year-old war hero who had received an O.B.E. while fighting for the Allies, planned a classic guerrilla war, aiming to win over the peasant masses, while at the same time launching hit-and-run raids from well-screened jungle camps.

By 1950, 646 civilians had been murdered, and hundreds more had been mutilated or were missing. But such tactics were self-defeating as well as brutal: they won the guerrillas few hearts and minds, and fear was to prove a poor substitute for sympathy. Furthermore, most of the guerrillas were Chinese Malayans, and were regarded by the rest of the population as foreign conspirators.

Effective British resistance was delayed by the death in an air crash of the Malayan High Commissioner, Sir Edward Gent. But in March, 1950, General Sir Harold Briggs, a veteran of Burma and the Western Desert, took charge of military operations and the campaign against the Communists quickly gathered momentum. Within a year, 40,000 British and Commonwealth troops were deployed across Malaya. Briggs also initiated a scheme to resettle the potential rebel sympathizers, thus controlling the "sea" of peasants in which – according to Maoist strategy – the guerrillas had to swim if they were to achieve victory.

Chin Peng, the Malayan Communist chief, joined the party in 1940 and became its head in 1947. The Malayan Federal government offered £10,000 if he were turned over to the authorities alive.

British troops and a Malay interpreter question a terrorist blasted from his foxhole during a jungle clash in 1951.

Victory-And Independence

While Britain established military superiority, steady progress towards independence for Malaya undermined Communist propaganda. But in 1951 Briggs returned home in ill-health and that same year Sir Edward Gurney, the High Commissioner, was assassinated.

However, the new High Commissioner, General Sir Gerald Templer, who also took charge of military operations, pursued the war against terrorism with ruthless vigour. In addition, the Malayans were plied with generous economic aid.

The double-pronged strategy worked. The guerrillas, unable to win popular support, were harried and starved into submission. By 1955 the struggle was largely over, though the Emergency ended only in 1960, three years after Malaya became independent.

Chin Peng was never caught. In a secret jungle meeting with Tunku Abdul Rahman, future Prime Minister of Malaysia, he spurned an invitation to surrender. He is still at large, and still, it is rumoured, planning revolution.

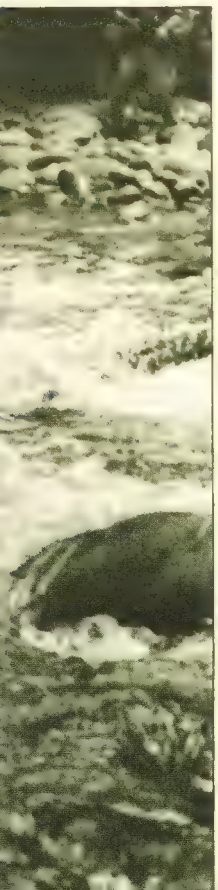
General Sir Gerald Templer, who engineered the British victory in Malaya between 1952 and 1954, glances nonchalantly from his helicopter cockpit before take-off.

A wounded soldier is carried across a jungle torrent towards a clearing to await the arrival of a rescue helicopter.

New Zealand troops, with Iban trackers from Sarawak, wade up to their necks in a Malayan river during a hunt for terrorists.

Tunku ("Prince") Abdul Rahman
Prime Minister of Malaysia, addr
a crowd in Kuala Lumpur in August,
on the eve of his country's independ

A Chinese woman worker on a rubber plantation reads an offer of amnesty. Millions of leaflets, promising cash payment to rebels who surrendered, were air-dropped into jungle villages.



III. The Last Confrontation

The Allies were prepared to fight for years if necessary until they had occupied Japan herself. It did not, of course, come to that. Immediately after the end of the European war in May, 1945, the Soviet Union declared war against Japan, and its extra forces and proximity would have greatly facilitated and hastened an invasion of Japan. By August, however, the Japanese government was considering surrender and any hesitation it may have had was destroyed by the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And so opened the final phase of the British Empire in the Far East. India and Pakistan became independent in August, 1947, Burma in January, 1948, and the Labour government adopted a policy of "preparing" the remaining Far Eastern territories for a similar future. So far as the British Empire had any further prospects, it was reckoned that they lay in Africa and the Middle East.

As the Japanese forces withdrew from China, Chiang was installed at the head of the central government and foreigners no longer enjoyed special legal immunity. It is possible to imagine the British might eventually have handed Hong Kong over to him, but by 1949 he had been defeated by Mao's Communist forces after a civil war that had raged for over 20 years – even during the Japanese occupation. Chiang and the Nationalists, with strong American backing, kept only the island of Formosa (Taiwan).

With the gunboats and the "foreign devils" gone, Mao built a closed, totalitarian society in China almost completely isolated from the rest of the world, although by the 1970s this xenophobia was showing signs of abating. It was as if, after a terrible century in which foreigners seemed to have brought little but trouble, the Chinese wanted to be on their own and to find a new identity.

One effect of Mao's rule over China was to increase the importance of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong. Hong Kong island had been ceded in perpetuity to the British at the end of the first Opium War in 1842, and the mainland "New Territories" were leased for 99 years in 1898. By the 1970s Hong Kong's 398·5 square miles were the last full-blown British colony of any significant size. Mao could easily have conquered it, and the British had no plans for serious military resistance. But although it was the largest haven for refugees from China, it was also China's most important point of contact with the outside world.

Hong Kong remains a unique blend of China and Europe. Whether the blend will remain when the British lease on the New Territories expires in 1997 and Red China assumes control, remains to be seen.

A notable success in the final phase of the British Far Eastern Empire was the establishment of Malaya as the independent, non-Communist state of Malaysia. The Malayan "Emergency" – the British refrained from calling it a war – lasted for 12 years and posed problems similar in some ways to those faced by the French, and later the Americans, in Vietnam.

Chin Peng, the Malayan Communist leader, commanded a guerrilla army, initially of 5,000 men. It had originally been raised by the British, under Colonel Spencer Chapman, as a jungle force to harass the Japanese after the fall of Singapore. The colonel had no illusions about Chin Peng's political views but described him as "Britain's most trusted guerrilla." His war-time services were rated highly enough for him to march in the Victory Parade in London.

The son of a Malayan Chinese bicycle repairer, he speaks six languages, is mild and courteous in manner and was only 26 at the start of the Emergency.

In the first phase of British post-war rule, the Malayan Communists, who posed as the sole victors against the

Strung like an animal's carcass to a pole, the body of an Indonesian paratrooper is hauled onto an army truck by Malaysian troops.

Malaysians demonstrate against Indonesian President Sukarno's attempts to undermine their country. Sukarno's picture, carried insultingly inverted, was later burned.

Despite the discipline and training of his supporters, Chin Peng failed to establish a Communist Malaya. Perhaps the most significant reason for his failure was that the Communists were overwhelmingly Chinese Malayans: the Chinese, who hated the Japanese, had eagerly joined the war-time jungle forces. Only a tiny minority of the Communists were Malayans or Indian Malayans, and thus the mass of the population looked upon the Communists as Chinese conspirators wanting to take over the country. The situation was not comparable to that of Vietnam, where the peasantry had no reason to regard the Communists as foreigners. Unlike Ho Chi Minh, Chin Peng was unable to fuse Communism and nationalism. This failure, for a guerrilla army trying to live off the ordinary population, was a critical handicap.

Then there was the obvious fact that the British were preparing to hand over political power to an elected government. They had in Tunku Abdul Rahman, who became the first Prime Minister of Malaya in August, 1957, a subtle politician who knew how to win popular support. As the British High Commissioner in South-East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, put it, Abdul Rahman had "a heart and a belief in his country." The old Malayan Japanese whom the "white men" could not conquer, used political and economic tactics, organizing strikes on rubber plantations and in mines, and conducting intensive agitation. In June, 1948, they switched to all-out war and terrorism. Their highly disciplined army had bases hidden deep in the jungle. Each base had a parade ground, huts for living quarters, lecture rooms for political indoctrination, and a red flag flying above. The jungle was so dense that the bases were scarcely visible, even from the air.

Supporting the fighting men was a much larger number of civilian Communists who supplied funds, acted as spies and, in many cases, were available as guerrillas if needed. The insurgents lived off the land, acquiring its food and supplies in the form of gifts or loot. There were ample weapons and ammunition hidden in jungle caches, which had once been dropped in by parachute by the British for use against the Japanese.

The Union Jack flies on an Iban canoe in Sarawak as tribesmen bring in Brunei rebels. After an unsuccessful revolt in 1962, many rebels fled to the Borneo jungle, but natives caught them and turned them over to the British security forces.

ruling class – the sultans – were firmly behind British policy, as were most of the Malay peasantry.

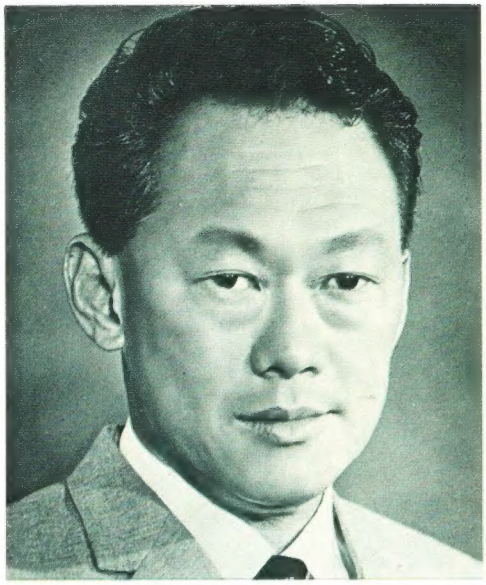
But there was a further factor – the cool efficiency of the British administration, police and Army. Certainly, there were mistakes and disputes, including the sacking of a governor, but the British in Malaya, unlike the Americans in Vietnam, knew the country well. They were often highly ingenious: straightforward cash bribery was one method of warfare. At times Communist leaders were allowed to surrender, change their names and set up government-financed businesses in remote areas where they were not known. There was skilful use of propaganda – aircraft with loudhailers flew over Communist camps promising lenient treatment for rebels who surrendered to the authorities.

Much of the success for victory over the Communists in Malaya is due to Malcolm MacDonald, who was High Commissioner for South-East Asia. It has been customary to praise such great proconsuls of the British Empire as Milner in South Africa and Baring in Egypt. MacDonald, though in a different sense, was a proconsul at least as great as they. He was the son of Ramsay MacDonald, Britain's first Labour Prime Minister, and in the 1920s and 1930s, while still a very young man, he had his own political career in Britain.

In 1931 he supported his father's decision to form the National government. Designed to weather the financial crisis of that year, it included Conservatives, Liberals and "National Labour." Although Malcolm MacDonald went on to become a Cabinet minister, this episode finished him as a politician. Hatreds were such that it would have been almost impossible for him to rejoin the Labour Party, and he had no wish to join the Conservatives.

He embarked, instead, on a diplomatic career, becoming British High Commissioner in Canada (1941–46). He arrived in Malaya in 1946, remaining in various capacities until 1955.

A genuinely modest and unassuming man, with no sense of racial superiority, he shocked British colonial society by his lack of pomposity, cheerfully allowing himself to be photographed in bathing trunks. He practised yoga and was rumoured to spend hours standing on his head, meditating. But nevertheless he was a natural diplomat.



Lee Kuan Yew made Singapore a republic.

The detailed task of coping with terrorism in Malaya was the duty of the security chief, Sir Robert Thompson, who wrote a classic book on the subject, *Defeating Communism*, and was consulted by successive American administrations about tactics in Vietnam. It was the affable MacDonald, however, who was responsible for all of the major political decisions.

Malaya became independent in 1957. The Emergency was still in effect, but the Communists were rapidly weakening. As a monarchy the new state occupied a unique position in the Commonwealth; the monarch was one of the sultans, each taking turns at the position. British forces continued to work with the new régime for more than two years until, finally, Chin Peng slipped over the border into Thailand and the battle was over. On July 31, 1960, the Emergency ended with a great victory parade through the capital, Kuala Lumpar.

The victory over the Malayan insurgents was virtually the end of the British Empire in the Far East. Malaya federated with the smaller British colonies in her vicinity – Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak which, after the Japanese occupation, Rajah Brooke had handed over to the Colonial Office. On September 16, 1963, the new grouping came into existence as the Federation of Malaysia.

The Federation provoked angry denunciation from President Sukarno, of Indonesia, who claimed that it was simply a creation of "British Imperialism." Sukarno announced a "Crush Malaysia" policy, which involved both military and economic "confrontation." Indonesian paratroops dropped near Malacca and guerrilla units infiltrated Malaysian territory in Borneo. British troops joined Malaysian forces in hunting down these jungle marauders. Fighting lasted until the downfall of President Sukarno in March, 1966. Three months later the new Indonesian government announced a cease-fire and subsequently restored normal relations with Malaysia. An absurd and fruitless war thus came to a welcome and honourable end.

While the fighting continued, however, constant political friction had led to Singapore's withdrawal from the Federation and in 1963 Singapore had become an independent republic under the premiership of Lee Kuan Yew.

Thus, in little over 60 years, the fortunes of the British Empire in the Far East suffered irreversible decline. With hindsight, it can be seen that these fortunes were starting to recede from the beginning of the 20th Century, at precisely the moment when they appeared to be brightest: the old China was about to disintegrate; Japan was a rising power with imperial ambitions of her own; and the United States was looking to its own interests in the region.

As early as February, 1932, Lord Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, warned that Britain, by herself, "must eventually swallow any and every humiliation in the Far East." Britain's humiliation followed ten years later at the hands of the Japanese. In September, 1945, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, salvaged some remnants of British pride and prestige by receiving the Japanese surrender in South-East Asia at Singapore. But this was a postscript to the old order rather than a prelude to the new. British power in the Far East, as elsewhere in the world, was reaching its inevitable end.

Officer, Grenadier Guards, 1845